



MINUTES

GEORGIA LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM Third Quarter Council Meeting September 2, 2010 - 9:30 AM

Call To Order

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order.

Present at the meeting were:

Council Members: Steve Stancil, Chairman, John Bembry, Stacy Patton, Paul Michael, Brent Dykes, Robert Farris, and Chris Clark.

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Stancil presented minutes from the June 17, 2010 Georgia Land Conservation program (GLCP) meeting for approval. Chris Clark made a motion seconded by John Bembry to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Program Update and 2010 Legislative Session

Curt Soper presented a summary of the Georgia Land Conservation Program which is also to be presented to the State Properties Commission, the Governor, and potentially the new Governor's administration. Curt stated that in 2003 an executive order created the Georgia Land Conservation Advisory Panel and in 2004 the Land Conservation Partnership Plan was produced. In the 2005 Legislative Session, the Georgia Land Conservation Act was introduced and passed. Then during the 2006 Legislative Session the Georgia Conservation Tax Credit Act was introduced and passed. The GLCP is housed at Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) and is guided by the Georgia Land Conservation Council composed of the State Property Office (Chair), Department of Natural Resources Commissioner, Department of Community Affairs Commissioner, Georgia Forestry Commissioner, Soil Water Conservation Commissioner and 4 at large members appointed by the Governor. The GLCP's goals include: water quality, wetlands protection, reducing erosion, flood protection, riparian buffers and natural habitats, working agricultural and forestry lands, scenic and historic resources, recreation, and connecting conservation areas. The GLCP facilitates and finances real estate transactions using competitive grants, low interest loans, tax incentives and outreach, consultation and technical support. The GLCP differs from previous state land conservation efforts by: having six state agencies actively engaged; being integrated as part of the Conserve Georgia effort; having broader goals and being statewide in its focus; having a stronger emphasis on funding leverage and partnerships; and a focus on the economic benefits of land conservation. Curt stated that conservation easements have also been a focus for the GLCP.

Curt stated that the current land conservation trends in Georgia are as follows:

- Many important conservation areas are on the market or available today;
- The State may not have significant cash resources available for land acquisition efforts in the near future;
- A significant volume of foreclosed properties with conservation values in Georgia today;
- There is a generational shift taking place within the family-owned farming community (60 percent of GA farmers (6.2M acres) are over 55);

- Generous landowners with tax obligations are donating conservation easements on their properties;
- The \$55 million revolving low interest loan fund is not being fully utilized.

Curt stated the following ideas for moving forward:

- Actively support making the expired federal tax incentives for land conservation donations permanent;
- Provide enough funding for the GLCP to continue covering costs associated with conservation easement donations to the State;
- Consider making existing conservation tax credits transferable to incentivize owners to donate properties into conservation;
- Consider earmarking some future GLCP dollars for a family farm conservation effort;
- Provide enough funding to continue working with the Department of Defense and leverage federal dollars on military base buffering efforts.
- Support statute changes to assist local government land conservation efforts;
- Modify the low interest loan fund to improve terms or provide modest GLCP loan forgiveness seed funding to attract more borrowers;
- Support private sector organizations in their effort to establish a voter approved permanent funding source for land conservation in Georgia.

City of Euharlee

Curt Soper presented a GLCP loan request from the city of Euharlee, in the amount of \$180,000 to acquire 16 acres along the Etowah River within its city limits. The property fronts the confluence of the Etowah River and Euharlee Creek. Much of the tract lies within the floodplain of these waterways, sloping towards them at grades exceeding 20 percent in some spots. The city intends to develop a passive recreational area on the site to serve residents in the growing subdivisions nearby. The new park will be improved with pervious walking paths, picnic areas, public river access and potentially a boat launch. The city plans to repay the GLCP loan with SPLOST funds over 9.9 years at a 2 percent interest rate and 1 percent closing fee. Chris Clark made a motion seconded by Brent Dykes to approve a \$180,000 loan with a 2 percent interest rate. The city of Euharlee will be charged a 1 percent closing fee \$1,800. The motion passed unanimously.

Report on Program Rules, Outreach, and Integration with other Planning Efforts

Andrew Szwak stated that the new Rules and Regulations revisions have been completed. The revisions included changing Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority to the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority as well as allowing for bridge loans. Andrew also stated that a new website with information regarding all the check off's on Georgia's income tax form has been launched and includes a link to GLCP's website. Andrew also stated that he is currently working with regional commission groups on their planning efforts.

Presentation from Atlanta Regional Commission

Dan Reuter and Allison Duncan updated the Georgia Land Conservation Council on the Atlanta Regional Commission Resource Plan.

Emerging Issues

Chris Clark stated how valuable the mapping is and DNR staff are now working on a project list of signification properties to hand off to the next administration. Robert Farris stated that the Statewide Forest Assement is complete and GFC is now working on a Strategic Plan.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for December 2 and the location to be determined.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:47 a.m.

Kim Yawn, Senior Executive Assistant

Kevin Clark, Executive Director